



STATE OF IOWA

ISSUE 2

REBUILD IOWA OFFICE (RIO) LEGISLATIVE WEEKLY

JANUARY 19, 2010

AN ELECTRONIC COPY OF THIS ISSUE AS WELL AS
LAST YEAR'S ISSUES CAN BE FOUND AT:
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RIO MISSION:

The Rebuild Iowa Office will lead the State of Iowa's efforts to rebuild safer, stronger and smarter in the wake of the 2008 severe storms and catastrophic flooding.

RIO VISION:

We envision a resilient Iowa that will be safe, sustainable and economically strong for its people, reaffirming its ties to the land, rivers, environment and rich cultural history.

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THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING THE 2010 REBUILD IOWA DAY AT THE CAPITOL ON JANUARY 14



THE RIO WORKS TO IMPROVE FEDERAL DISASTER RECOVERY PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

Iowa's recovery from the 2008 floods and tornadoes has led the state to conclude that major reforms are needed at the federal level to improve how future disasters are handled. While the RIO continues to coordinate the statewide recovery effort, it has also sought input from local, state and federal stakeholders and partners involved in the recovery to create a set of overarching recommended changes to the current federal system.

Reforming recovery in the United States requires a fundamental shift in the approach to and planning for major disasters. While FEMA serves as the federal coordinating agency for a disaster's *response* effort, one federal agency or structure does not exist to coordinate a *recovery* effort states can rely on. In order to ensure well-coordinated recoveries that

maximize the opportunities major disasters present, as well as minimize the long-term negative impacts, a shift in approach is critical.

The RIO's overarching recommendation is that the federal government creates a disaster recovery framework with one coordinating body (department), one set of rules and expectations, and funding and programs that are designed with long-term recovery in mind. It is imperative the system address the following issues and elements:

Provide flexible and predictable disaster-track funding for a set threshold of major disasters.

- Provide states with up-front (not reimbursement-based) block grant recovery funding immediately following a major disaster.

- Use a formula that is consistent across all states and disasters based on damages or other program funding.
- Allow states to set program priorities and parameters, including income limits and other regulations such as lead abatement and the use of volunteer labor.
- Allow for a global local match requirement that calls on state and local governments to contribute a certain percentage to the overall recovery, not individual programs and projects.

Allow for a shared, real-time data system for all levels of government.

- Create a shared database for information and applications from those

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impacted that is a part of a coordinated system of case management for impacted individuals.

- Allow impacted individuals to complete one application and sign one privacy waiver that allows all government agencies to access their recovery information.
- Allow all administering entities to update this database with information to improve the speed and accuracy of programs.
- Include comprehensive loss verification for each individual that documents all loss so that multiple inspections and other checks are not needed.
- Include a clear and consistent shared system of checking for duplications of benefit that involves all related agencies and creates common definitions and policies that prevent fraud, while still allowing individuals to receive needed benefits.

Coordinate damage and needs assessments.

- Work with states on a common system for damage assessment data collection that is completed in each Presidentially-declared disaster (not abandoned once the declaration is made).
- Designate one agency to provide clear documentation of a state's overall losses and an assessment of funding gaps left by recovery programs.

Provide resources and support for immediate case management.

- Immediately following the initial response, impacted

individuals and businesses desperately need a system that provides them with case management guidance in planning for their long-term recovery. Such a case management system should be organized at the local level, but needs federal support and resources in order to successfully provide assistance.

- This system should serve as a gateway for recovery assistance, requiring that individuals work with case managers in order to qualify.

Change the structure of hazard mitigation funding.

- FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) focuses nearly all resources on states following a major disaster. Focusing more resources on pre-disaster, mitigation work would greatly improve its success.
- Provide greater resources for planning so that mitigation projects can be prepared before funding is available.
- Recognize that some elements currently considered mitigation, such as housing buyouts, are really recovery programs. Create a separate mechanism for those projects that allows for quicker approval so that homeowners are able to move on.

These recommendations have been shared with Iowa's congressional delegation as well as representatives of several federal agencies, including FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate and U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan, both of whom have visited the state and learned about Iowa's disaster recovery first-hand.

In addition to these efforts, the RIO is also participating in the National Disaster Recovery Framework discussion currently being led by FEMA at the President's request. In October, a regional video teleconference was hosted by FEMA Region VII. Staff from the RIO and other Iowa representatives listened in and shared their thoughts about needed changes at the federal level.

On Jan. 6, 2010, the RIO, along with multiple local, state and federal agencies participated in a day-long meeting with the National Commission on Children and Disasters, which is based in Washington, D.C. Commission Chairperson Mark Shriver and Commission members Sheila Leslie and David Schonfeld hosted the meetings at the Linn County Health Department in Cedar Rapids. Topics such as school recovery, mental health services, child welfare, child care, disaster case management and long-term community recovery were discussed in a roundtable setting. School superintendents, mental health workers, members of long-term recovery committees and officials working with child care centers and the juvenile justice system, as well as legislators and city officials, took part in the conversations throughout the day. The Commission intends to include its findings from the meetings into the development of a national recovery framework and the Commission's next report to President Obama and Congress due in October 2010.

On Jan. 8, 2010, the RIO's Executive Director Lt. General Ron Dardis took place in another federal roundtable, hosted by the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. The meeting brought

together stakeholders from various disaster-impacted states to gather feedback on the national response framework; state and local capacity, community planning, and technical assistance; nonprofit and private sector capacity; economic and environmental resilience and sustainability; and the review of federal programs. The purpose of this session was to provide the Obama administration and federal agencies ideas on how to improve and reform specific federal programs that are central to long-term disaster recovery. At this meeting, Lt. General Dardis presented Iowa's federal recommendations for improvements to the national recovery framework. The feedback provided at this session will be used to draft recommendations to the Obama Administration, which are due April 2010. More than a dozen staff from the White House, U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, Homeland Security and FEMA, were in attendance.

As another means of feeding into this national conversation, the RIO is also partnering with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Congressman David Loebsack for an Iowa Disaster Recovery Learning Conference to be held Jan. 29, 2010 at Kirkwood Center for Continuing Education in Cedar Rapids. The conference will bring together representatives from non-profit organizations, voluntary agencies, faith-based organizations and community foundations active in both Iowa and Gulf Coast recovery. The group will discuss recommended changes to local, state and federal recovery efforts and suggest best practices going forward. HUD plans to use these recommendations as a centerpiece to their work on the National Disaster Recovery Framework.